A DEFENCE OF WINCH

"Everything is what it is and not another thing" - (Butler).
Understanding, making intelligible, modes of discourse other than those
with which one is familiar (and so which do not have to be 'understood'
in quite such the same way) must somehow face this fact.   This note
attempts to show that the course suggested by Hanson is not the best of
the alternatives.   This does not mean that I altogether support the
Winchian procedure, but that

(i) Hanson's criticisms of Winch do not stand if

(ii) it is measured against what I take Winch to be really saying.

In other words, although Winch can perhaps to criticised as by, for
example, Nielsen (1967) and MacIntyre (Hick 1964), Hanson's attempts are
at least partially invalidated by the fact that they are not properly
directed against Winch.   Further, I attempt to show that the procedure
suggested by Hanson would have to face relatively severe criticism if it
is to stand in its present form.

Since I am limiting this discussion to Winch and Hanson, I should
like to begin by briefly indicating the broader perspective within which
this debate should be viewed .   To suggest, that is, how Winch can be
located within a broader sphere of academic endeavour.

If we say, following Martin, that the notion 'God' may be used in
either of two ways (as a proper name referring to a particular being or
as a descriptive term) then it can be shown that using it in both ways
at once leads to a contradiction.   Hughes replies that this argument to
establish the contradictory nature of Christian belief is wrong, for God
is not thought of as a particular thing 'on the lips of believers.'
(Hughes 1962).   Which then is the correct course for meta-theology?
To characterise religious belief in terms of the patterns of usage and
sense within actual religious discourse?   Or to apply such
organisational devices as proper names and descriptive phrases, when
these have been developed to expose the 'logic' of discourse not of
'God' but of particular things?   When there is incommensurability
between our criteria of characterisation and the criteria, either
explicit or not, of judgment within other modes of discourse, then which
stands?   Or can a meta-level of mutual relevance be established?   "Which
of these programmes is preferable is perhaps the most important question
for meta-theology (even, mutatis mutandis, for all meta-theorising)"
(Hughes 1962).

Theologians and Philosophers of Religion have had to grapple with
this problem for what is at stake is the nature of belief in God: the
role of reason in religious understanding and in understanding religion.
But anthropologists, in the main, appear to be more concerned with
retaining, in a lazy fashion, the absolute and immutable relevance of
those concepts and organisational devices belonging to their tradition.
But what is at stake is as important, at least for the atheist, as those
issues which Theologians have written so much about (Gill 1966, Alston,
Hepburn 1963, Coburn 1963, Macquame 1967, Ramsey 1959).   That is, how
to best characterise and so understand other modes of discourse.   So,
in following through the arguments advocated by Winch and Hanson as to
how we can best characterise other modes of thought (in such terms, for
example, as - incoherent, meaningless, instrumental, expressive,
paradoxical, mystical), it should be borne continually in mind that the
more · sophisticated arguments and organisational devices (such as,
non-assertive, intentional, factual, quasi-attitudinal etc.) have been
developed by Theologians and Philosophers of Religion.   And that such
problems as whether religious language is autonomous, unique and so
independent of external, logical analysis (McPherson 1955) or whether we
can treat religious language as though it were empirical status (Ramsey 59)

are of precisely the same variety that face Anthropologists in many of the more interesting fields of their work.

Malinowski, according to Leach (Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, pp.339 - 334) "sought to evade the difficulties raised by simple trait comparisons by blandly affirming that every social event is uniquely defined by its total context" and that if this were the case "all cross-cultural comparison would be futile". It seems to me that Hanson is attributing a very similar view to Winch (my emphasis): "Winch would have us understand another culture in its own terms" for "a people's thought and behaviour are intelligible only in terms of the concepts of reality held by that people". Such concepts of reality vary from context to context, and since there are no concepts independent of their context, then various forms of life cannot be equated and so mutually understood through the application of such common denominators.

If this were true, that Winch was really saying that each form of life "is a self-contained entity which can be understood only in its own terms" then Hanson would be justified in continuing to assert that Winch is clearly striving "to approach, as closely as possible, the goal of understanding as the native understands". This in turn would involve Winch in the fatal, neo-Malinowskian either/or situation which Hanson suggests is the case for Winch - "we thus have the options of viewing another system of thought in terms of our concepts of reality or in terms of its own concepts of reality," Winch himself supposedly insisting on the latter course. Elsewhere in his article, Hanson makes this either/or all the more so - their thought now comes to be intelligible either "only in terms of their concepts of reality"(1) or intelligible "only in terms of our concepts of reality."(2)

From this basis Hanson proceeds to suggest that although "Adopting Winch's prescription of viewing a philosophy in its own terms", another logical step is necessary - for their concepts of reality are "intelligible to us only in terms of our own concepts of reality". It can be seen that the phrases "in terms of", "in its own terms" and "only" are not used very consistently. At one stage Hanson is suggesting that we (a) follow Winch when this is position '(1) and that (b) we add position.(2). This is clearly logically impossible; the second step can only hold if it is taken that what we understand is not only in their own terms.

It would seem that the logic of understanding other modes of discourse is indeed wonderous, and that Winch is even more mysterious. Hanson's own position becomes even more confounded when we follow through his adoption of Winch's prescription (an adoption, which, significantly enough, does not involve the word "only"). For, on completion of his analysis, Hanson qualifies this stance - "My analysis ... may appear to qualify as an example of understanding another culture in its own terms" and then, most importantly "that the analysis considered the problem in terms of concepts of reality attributed to the Africans", or again "I do not claim that this analysis provides understanding of African thought in its own terms; still less do I claim that in thinking through the conclusions of this analysis we are thinking like Africans think".

Can Winch be refuted in this way? First though, the reasons Hanson gives for the refutation of Winch which this last quotation implies, might help us to understand his train of thought. He makes the following points

(a) that understanding a philosophy in its own terms presupposes an intimate knowledge of their language and culture. Since his own analysis was made without such a knowledge, Hanson suggests that their own terms need not be well known.

b) that even if their terms were relatively well known, they could
   never be understood as the natives understand them,

c) and even if such an understanding could be acquired, "when he
   tries to explain it in another language and according to
   different concepts of reality it is clearly not being treated
   in its own terms".

d) That if another philosophy is to be understood entirely in its
   own terms, then such useful questions as those posed by Hanson
   could not be so asked, and finally, perhaps most importantly,

e) that at least in terms of the analysis followed by Hanson,
   African philosophy is not revealed in its own terms. Instead,
   the procedure must be in terms of our criteria: when we
   understand another philosophy, we understand it according to
   what properly constitutes understanding for us.

In each of these arguments, Hanson is rejecting that view which
holds that other philosophies should be understood in their own terms.
Thus he is contradicting his own adoption of Winch and so is not adding
another logical step (which we have seen is impossible, but which
Hanson claims to do), but is developing an altogether different
procedure. I do not disagree that this "in terms of" procedure is not
valid, but it is precisely this procedure which Hanson himself makes
invalid by quote (1) when he implies that Winch is saying only in terms
of their concepts.

What then are we to make of this? First that Winch is apparently
both in favour with "in their own terms" and "in terms of our concepts".
This seems unlikely, for Winch would be the first to realise that the
two phrases have different meanings ("in terms of" suggests that x is
always in terms of something else y , and so involves attributing
something to x which is other than x). Secondly, that Hanson's own
analysis is both in terms of and in their own terms, the former being
divided into either in terms of their concepts or in terms of ours.
Thirdly, that Winch is characterised as being an arch-fideist - one who
sees a series of self-contained entities each of which are virtually
unintelligible outside their own terms.

I now want to attempt to show what Winch is really saying, then to
return and suggest that Hanson's five specific criticisms are not only
based on logical confusions , but also do not affect Winch. In
exploring Winch's argument I hope

(i) to indicate that Winch is not an arch-fideist in stressing
    the uniqueness of participant understanding (viz "in their own
    terms")

(ii) that this follows from Winch's 'theory' of meaning and

(iii) that Winch, whilst building a "meta-theory" on which to
     found cross-cultural intelligibility does not

(iv) fall back into that science-centric view which appears to
    dominate MacIntyre and,to a lesser extent, Hanson.

In his book (1958), Winch's basic point is that "the notion of a
human society involves a scheme of concepts which is logically
incompatible with the kind of explanation offered in the natural
sciences" (p.73). Why? Because since the social scientist has to
"accept" (p.40) that "a man's social relations with his fellows are
permeated with his ideas about reality" (p.23), that "the very
categories of meaning etc. are logically dependent for their sense on
social interactions between men" (p.44), then it follows (p.73) that the

meaning of social behaviour and ideas cannot be settled by experiment. For example, whereas the temperature at which water freezes can be settled experimentally, such a procedure is not possible when what is to be decided is how many grains of wheat have to be added together before one has a heap" (p.73). It follows that insofar as the social scientist is dealing with meanings, it is misleading to follow the scientific procedure of applying theories which themselves establish connections. Instead, since "all behaviour which is meaningful is ipso-facto rule-governed" (p.52) our concepts of social phenomena or acts must be co-extensive with that of meaningful acts and notions. From knowledge of what it is to follow a rule, analysis can proceed by "examining the nature of the rules according to which judgments of identity are made" (p.83), when "such judgments are intelligible only relatively to a given mode of human behaviour governed by its own rules". (3)In this sense sociological judgments cannot be made in abstract, so to be applied as theories, but depend on, are governed by, the rules of what is being studied.

Since I am not here criticising Winch, I take it for granted that although it is perhaps arguable that Winch is incorrect in his apparent rejection of scientific explanation (I use the word 'apparent"for it could be maintained that all that Winch is saying is that such apparent understanding does not involve scientific explanation), his basic emphasis stands as valuable (MacPherson 1955 , for example, shows how useful the notion of meaning in terms of context usage is when he explains why certain beliefs which were only a stumbling block to the Jews became foolishness to the Greeks, to end as nonsense for the logical positivists.) In the article Winch wrote in 1964, he develops, without I think, contradicting much of what he had earlier written, this basic framework into a form of more direct relevance to Anthropology. His 'theory' of meaning is now more clearly presented - if we can learn what it is to follow a rule (which in turn entails that we know what it is not to follow the rule viz. that we can predict what is involved by following the rule) and what the point of the rule is (pp.318 and 321) then we can claim to understand the sense of the discourse. Thus the sociologists' judgments should replicate the native criteria of coherence. I say coherence for on p.312 Winch writes that a partial, but important answer to the question - what criteria have we for saying that something makes sense? is that sense depends on there being a state of non-contradiction (viz. that only in such a case can it be said that rules are being followed). Again, especially on this last point, Winch might be partially mistaken, but the general thesis stands. It has much in common with such a Wittgen tein position as expressed in Wittgenstein's answer (Philosophical Investigations § 381) to the question - 'Why do you call that "red"'? 'I have learnt English'. It also bears similarities to Evans-Pritchard's comment that he could claim to understand other societies when he could predict what would happen in many social situations.

What then Winch is saying is that understanding should not be equated with full participation, thus making cross-cultural intelligibility all but impossible, but that the social scientist understands as an observor. It might therefore be claimed that this means he is thus not 'fully' understanding. And such comments of Winch's as "The Azande hold beliefs that we cannot possibly share" (p.307) or again "We are not seeking a state in which things appear to us just as they do to members of another society, and perhaps such a state is unattainable anyway" (p.317), do seem to support this view. But, as far as I can see, what Winch is maintaining, only means that, to take one example, 'I believe in God' has an infinite variety of meanings to participants, infinite in that their 'private' meanings depend on individual idiosyncracies etc., whereas understanding, as Winch sees it, is to expose the social logic and point-ness of these phrases; to make explicit the 'grammar' of discourse; to equate

meaning with use (1964 p.316); to, as in the case of Philosophers of Religion, "elucidate" (- make explicit that which is implicit) the peculiar natures of those forms of life called religion (1958 p.41).

Admittedly, it could still be maintained that this 'observer' 'theory' of meaning, which allows reporting back, cannot grasp all that the participant shares - so Winch elsewhere writes "if the judgments of identity of the sociologists of religion rest on criteria taken from religion, then his relation to the performers of religious activity cannot be just of the observer to the observed" and "the sociologist of religion must himself have some religious feeling if he is to make sense of the religious movement he is studying". But the underlined words show that he is still talking about the observer who attempts to gain maximal fideism. In any case, it could be held that to grasp the real nature of religious belief is not really part of the sociologist's job.

What follows from this is that Winch cannot be classed, as Nielson 1967 does, as one who claims that in order to fully understand religious discourse one must have a participant's understanding of a belief and acceptance nature. Instead, his 'theory' of meaning escapes such 'participant's relativism' and allows Winch to do what Hanson suggests he does not - fully face the problem of how "to bring another society's conception of intelligibility (to them) into (intelligible!) relation with our own conception of intelligibility (to us)" (1964 p.317). Or "to present an account of them that will somehow satisfy the criteria of intelligibility demanded by the culture to which he and his readers belong". (1964 p.307).

Where Winch is a relativist is that such a sociological interpretation as constituted by the discerned logic and 'point-of-ness' must involve "extending our conception of intelligibility as to make it possible for us to see what intelligibility amounts to in the life of the society we are investigating". We must extend our 'own' way of looking at things - not impose our boundaries, classifications etc. (p.318). It is for this reason that Leach (Encylopaedia of Social Sciences) argues along Winchian lines to criticise amongst others, Murdoch's Procedure. (See also Winch p.319). Thus, in a style reminiscent of Waisman, Winch is suggesting that the art of discerning maximal commonality (relativism of this style does not stress uniqueness) might well involve a considerable rethinking and realignment of our traditional categories . (See Winch 1964 p.323 and 1958 p.87 for examples of what is involved .) Only in such a way can 'science-centricism' be avoided - MacIntyre, the logical positivists and Lévy-Bruhl can be included amongst those who have imposed alien criteria so obscuring those judgments that the sociologist should be making (1964 p.320, 321).

Returning to Hanson's five criticisms, bearing in mind that understanding for Winch is equated with the exposure of social logic in terms of relevant/relative organisational devices within, or extended from, our culture, then

(i) Hanson's either/or formulation does not apply

(ii) criticism (a) is not relevant - for not only does it rest on an 'in its own terms' Winch, but Winch's own analysis was based on a brilliant ethnography of which he himself did not have deep knowledge. And in any case - all would agree, the deeper the knowledge the better.

(iii) Criticism (b) fares little better - we have seen that Winch says that such an understanding is impossible (for, in the same sense, I can claim that I can never 'know' what any sentence 'means' for anyone else).

(iv) Criticism (c) is rendered of dubious value in that Winch is suggesting that although it is inevitable that different concepts are involved, they should, if possible, only be different in so far as translation itself is involved. He would not dispute that since we understand, it cannot be in their terms; what matters is degree of fidiesm, which his 'theory' of meaning maximises.

(v) Point (d) is also misleading, for Winch would stress that we, with our perspective (critical in this sense) should ask as many questions as possible in order to discern which of our many organisational devices are most relevant/relative to the alien mode of thought. Thus Winch (1964 p.319) writes that since "the onus is on us to extend our understanding" we must seek a foothold". (p.310. See also p.320).

Finally, criticism (e) - the argument which is the king-pin of Hanson's paper. Hanson suggests that within our dominant epistemology, at least since Comte, "puzzling observable phenomena are made / intelligible by viewing them as if they conform to invariable principals or laws which we devise and label 'theories'. So, in order to make intelligible other modes of discourse (and so their 'internal' intelligibility) Hanson says that they must be treated "as if" such principals or laws operate within them. This "as if" application of the theory in Hanson's own analysis is claimed to refute Winch in that relationships are established as in the natural sciences, and that intelligibility only follows on this establishment.

I do not think that because we cannot understand (and report back) merely from within, that (a) when we participate, as field workers, we understand as a scientist does and (b) that organisational devices are applied in such an experimental way. I do not think that Hanson could possibly have done what he claims to have. - How, to meet the strong objections raised by Winch in his "heap" analogy, does Hanson verify and falsify (procedures of the essence of the experimental approach) his theory? If he does not effect these operations, how can it be called a theory? Another objection (perhaps not so strong) - how can it be applied unless something is first understood? MacIntyre 1964 p.118 shows that this argument can be used to refute Lévy-Bruhl and the more extreme logical positivists in their form of understanding religious discourse. Finally, such comments as - we understand other societies "according to what for us constitutes proper understanding" when this mode of understanding is limited to the theories of logical realism, has all the ear-marks of that arbitariness and a priorism that once characterised such rigid theories of meaning as logical positivism. A narrowness Winch meets with "the notion of intelligibility is systematically ambiguous".

What then has Hanson really done? And how is it that he answers his puzzle successfully one thinks, whilst claiming to follow this course? I suggest that he has appealed to rested his analysis on, those universal criteria of intelligibility on which Winch, as we have already indicated, rests his case. To repeat my point that I am not attempting to put Winch into a critical perspective, I do not ask how far Winch's universal criteria avoid category mistakes. Perhaps, in fact, this is Winch's Achilles heel, for although he has attempted to develop a meta-level of organisational devices which are of universal applicability and so only articulate what is already there into observer language, I am not sure whether, for example, the paradox's of mystics (sentences which both have a use and are contradictory) could successfully be handled by Winch. But I do not think that to say - he is treating other modes of discourse in an 'as if' form, is to refute Winch on the grounds that his devices cannot be spoken of, in such terms, by the participants. For the criteria of intelligibility on which he rests his case are implicit in all (?) discourse, viz. they

are necessary conditions for communication, and even though they might
be conceptualised differently, they are, in a sense, universally the
same.

For example, Levi Strauss (1966 p.10 11) says that we can "most
easily begin to understand forms of thought which seem very strange to
us" by appealing to the fact that they are all founded on this demand
for order". Clarke (Hick p.136) writes "although there is no common
expressible formula for intelligibility among all men, there is at
least a common basic exigency of rationality in a wider sense". Winch,
besides making similar assertions (including quoting R. Rhees to the
effect that language games are not self-contained) suggests that
universal intelligibility could also be based on such 'limiting
concepts' as death, war, sex etc, and on the necessary real/unreal,
true/false conditions.

That these criteria are implicit (as if) in alien expression can
readily be demonstrated - Fletcher(See Levi Strauss 1966 p.10) "All
sacred things must have their place" - native informant. Or can we,
for example, imagine myths which do not, in some sense or another,
express existential 'limiting' notions? It is interesting in this
context to see how close Winch is to such theologians as Bultmann,
theologians with a considerable vested interest in retaining 'the .
meaning' but also in making it intelligible in terms of other rules of
intelligibility, other language games .

So, returning to Hanson's analysis, what he has really done is to
appeal to such criteria. Thus his answer involves only exposing what
is entailed by the rules of African beliefs. It does not seem to me
that he has appealed to any of the fullest expressions of logical
realism but only to logical realism, in the very weak sense that it can
be said to be our particular expression of order (for the Azande can
predict [in his sound-sense sphere]and many advanced physical
scientists no longer base intelligibility on such prediction). If
Hanson had appealed to the more sophisticated criteria of logical
realism, he could easily have ended up as MacIntyre does (See Winch
1964 p.320) and as it is, Hanson is led, unnecessarily I feel, into a
position where he has to say the . Zande thought is not of a pseudo-
scientific nature.

Perhaps logical positivism is just around the corner. But as it
is, Hanson really only engages in the art of hindsight of relativism
(why else would he adopt Father Tempel's formulation). At all costs
a priorism's should not be applied to what is essentially an art - an art
of argument, not of experiment - "the sociologists who misinterpret
alien cultures are like philosophers getting into difficulties over the
use of their own concepts (1958 p.114)."

Whether or not, for example, Winch is correct that we cannot
criticise alien rules without knowing their meaning (which we presumably
have already grasped in order to criticise them) injustice is another
matter - a matter which rests on that most elusive of all organisational
devices - contradiction. But the notion of the 'science of
understanding' appears to rest on the weakest of grounds.